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MERCED HIGH RECEIVES ACHEIVEMENT AWARD FROM U.S. EPA

(Merced, CA – May 1, 2007) Tom Scheidt strolls around campus checking out the classrooms at Merced High School. After three decades as an administrator he wants to make sure he leaves a lasting impression on the campus when he retires in June. Fittingly, one of his final projects comes full circle with one of first experiences dealing with asthma as a football coach 27 years ago.

The year was 1980 and Merced High had a tremendous running back on the team that season. The athlete led the state in rushing that year and went on to play in college. “He had asthma,” Scheidt said. “He was constantly having to use oxygen on the sidelines to help him breathe. One time he told me it felt like he was drowning, and I have never been able to forget those words.”

When Scheidt heard about the Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools program through the Merced/Mariposa County Asthma Coalition a couple of years ago he was immediately interested. After attending a training, he came back and started working with the asthma coalition to set up an Indoor Air Quality team at Merced High.

The team’s work included an indoor air assessment last Fall that measured such things as CO₂ levels, humidity and temperatures in classrooms and offices. Data was collected from teachers on various indoor air elements in their classrooms and a working action plan was created to correct problem areas. Educating both students and staff about the importance of clean indoor air has also been a critical piece in the puzzle.

Scheidt thought the health benefits would be immensely helpful in raising attendance levels and academic achievement. “It just makes sense,” he said. “When your teachers and students are in a comfortable environment and not getting sick they are bound to avoid being absent and perform at a higher level.”

**Remember our new
contact information!**

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Today, Scheidt is accepting an award from the U.S. EPA for the work he's done with the Tools for Schools program. "Our work is far from over here, but we've made a great start," he said. "I know there are a lot of things that need to happen before we start to see asthma go away but I know this is an important step in helping our students right here at Merced High."

The latest data shows asthma rates continue their upward trend with 1 in 5 Valley children diagnosed with the chronic disease.

This statistic is seen even more clearly today compared to (then) Coach Scheidt's experience 27 years ago. Jessica Casey has coached collegiate Volleyball teams throughout the Midwest and when she arrived at Merced College three years ago she definitely noticed a difference in her players. "There are always inhalers lying all over the gym during practice and if they're not in there you'll see them in the locker room," Casey said. "I've never seen so many players with asthma. In my whole career before I came here I had maybe one girl with asthma; last Fall, half my team had it."

This year Casey is following Scheidt's lead and getting involved in raising awareness about asthma. Merced College Volleyball is joining Golden Valley Health Centers, Mercy Hospital, and Wells Fargo in donating a new bicycle to four local student artists that submitted posters to the Asthma Coalition's 5th-annual World Asthma Day coloring contest in the Merced Sun-Star.

Other Asthma Coalition work includes partnering with over 130 schools, preschools, and daycares to raise air quality flags that indicate whether or not daily outdoor air is safe for children and the public to breathe.

The Tools for Schools program is a simple and easy way of comprehensively avoiding or fixing indoor air quality issues throughout a school campus. It was created by the U.S. EPA and is free. The tool kit outlines how and why it is important to maintain clean air in the classroom. Indoor air can be two to five times more polluted than outdoor air in the worst scenarios. Resulting health problems can be subtle and can include headache, fatigue, and nausea, shortness of breath, coughing, and dizziness. Much of what causes poor indoor air can also trigger an asthma attack. With most of our time spent indoors and climbing asthma rates, maintaining clean indoor air is important to keep in mind.

For more information about the Merced/Mariposa County Asthma Coalition contact the coalition office at (209) 385-5490 or on the web at www.mmcac.com. For more information on the Tools for Schools program check out EPA's indoor environments website at www.epa.gov/iaq/schools/.

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